

The Roses

As though we had returned, flowers
were strewn beneath our marching feet.
It seemed the trees had bent their boughs
to rain their adulation on the street.

*Red roses all the way through France,
the heart-red roses of last chance.*

In Paris, girls hung perfumed wreaths
around our necks; some gave a kiss,
the way we'd used to dream a girl might kiss
a lover when at last he leaves.

*Red roses all the way through France,
the lip-red roses of last chance.*

In Flanders, waist-deep in the mire
death rose to bath our brothers in, we knelt
in silence, watching friends on fire
and could not find a word for what we felt.

*Red roses all the way through France,
the blood-red roses of last chance.*

O children of our children's children,
remember us; do not forget
what must be borne and then forgotten
in that war you have not started yet.

*Red roses all the way through France,
the poppy-red roses of last chance.*

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A poem commissioned to commemorate the centenary of the First World War

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